DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/GIS/IPS

REVIEWED BY Sharon Jacobsen DATE 1/22/92

RDS ☐ or XDS ☐ EXT. DATE

TS AUTH. REASON(S)

ENDORSE EXISTING MARKINGS ☐

DECLASSIFIED ☑ ☑

RELEASE DENIED ☐ RELEASABLE ☑

PA or FOI EXEMPTIONS

a. Upper House Chairman Nguyen Van Huyen seems to be everyone's favorite potential list leader; a Huyen list, with GVN support (which is a possibility) or without official support, should win, and will return several incumbents (best present guesses are the unexciting but adequate Tran Huu Phuong and Lam Van Hiep, and possibly Bui Van Giai and/or Tran Ngoc Nhuan) and also send a few new faces to the Upper House.

b. Tran Van Don, controversial opposition leader, will probably head a list and in an honest election stands a good chance of winning (particularly if Duong Van Minh can be induced to openly support Don), though not by his overwhelming 1967 margin. Don may have handicapped himself by promising several positions on his slate to People's Bloc colleagues, a promise which if kept will not leave room for many outsiders and would return several relative nonentities to the Upper House.

c. Nguyen Gia Hien and Huynh Van Cao are expecting support from President Thieu, but they will have to exercise care to keep from canceling each other out. If they both head lists, and both lists win, it would mean (since Chairman Huyen appears to be a winner) a virtual Catholic sweep of the election. Such a contingency should not be ruled out because lists backed by both the GVN and the Catholics will be difficult to beat, particularly if the oppositionists do not unite but instead spread themselves, and their votes, over several slates. Hien is the surer bet for re-election if he heads a list because he can mobilize his well-organized Greater Solidarity Force behind him. Cao's chances are assured if he can obtain a spot on Chairman Huyen's list, less certain otherwise. Both Hien and Cao could return a few Senators to the Upper House with them.

4. It should be emphasized that the above observations and any other predictions made in this airgram are tentative and preliminary. With only three possible winning lists (assuming Senators run on 10-man lists as in 1967) out of a possible 40 to 50 slates, all candidates, incumbent Senators and otherwise, will be attempting to attract the broadest possible support and will be seeking alliances in unlikely places. We will not know actual slate lineups until the candidacy filing deadline is reached and approved candidates' lists are posted.

5. An assessment of individual incumbent Senators' election plans, using the 1967 Upper House lists as an arbitrary point of departure and thus demonstrating how the lists are affected by the election, is forwarded as an enclosure to this airgram.

6. Effects of the Election on Upper House Bloc Arrangements. Following the drawing to determine which Senators would serve only three-year terms, Upper House blocs were realigned, the most significant change being the

reorganization of Senator Tran Van Don's bloc and its transformation into the more outspokenly oppositionist People's Bloc. (For the current status of Upper House groupings, see Saigon A-28 of January 26, 1970.)

7. Present Upper House groupings are affected as follows by the necessity of electing 30 Senators this year:

a. People's Bloc: Nine of the 15 members of this oppositionist bloc, including bloc leader Tran Van Don and deputy bloc leader Mrs. Nguyen Phuoc Dai, are 3-year term Senators. However, several active and vocal critics of the GVN, such as Do Quang Giai, Nguyen Manh Bao, Le Tan Buu, and Hong Son Dong, are 6-year Senators and can be expected to continue in an oppositionist posture for the remainder of their terms. None of these four has the stature or personality to lead an oppositionist bloc as effectively as Don. However, they would provide a hard core around which opposition could coalesce in a post-1970 election Upper House, should Don not be returned to the legislature.

b. Social Democratic Bloc: Thirteen of the 19 members of this generally pro-Thieu bloc have three-year terms. Several of the most active and constructive Senators, such as Tran Ngoc Nhuan, Bui Van Giai, Truong Tien Dat, Tran Ngoc Oanh, Pham Nam Truong, and Nguyen Gia Hien, are included in this number. Bloc leader Dang Van Sung, however, drew a six-year term, so President Thieu has not lost his good right hand in the Upper House. Sung is enough of a politician to build a new pro-government grouping, if necessary, using the small nucleus of six-year Senators in his bloc and recruiting members from the newly-elected Senators after the election.

c. Independent Group: The Independent Group emerged from the drawing of terms almost intact. Only 6 of this group's present 23 members are 3-year termers, and four of these six are relative newcomers to the group (former Foreign Minister Tran Chanh Thanh, Pham Van Trien, and Revolutionary Dai Viets Ton That Uan and Nguyen Van Man). Group spokesman Nguyen Huy Chieu and the more active leadership elements of the group (Nguyen Tu Ban, Nguyen Van Chuc, and Le Phat Dat) all drew six-year terms. Only two longtime Independents (Tran Huu Phuong and Lam Van Hiep) must seek re-election. However, Upper House Chairman Nguyen Van Huyen, the "soul" of the Independent Group, drew a 3-year term. If he runs and wins, which is likely, his slate could be expected to provide several new recruits for the Independent Group, increasing this element's already considerable, and generally constructive, influence in the Upper House.

BUNKER

TENTATIVE ELECTION PLANS OF INCUMBENT SENATORS WHO MUST SEEK RE-ELECTION, ARRANGED IN TERMS OF 1967 SLATES

1. TRAN VAN DON

Five of the 10 Senators who ran on Don's "Farmer, Worker, Soldier" slate must seek re-election:

a. Tran Van Don (Leader, People's Bloc - PB) - Will probably head a slate, despite the fact he recently professed to an Embassy Officer that his "political career is over". Although Don's "third force" proposal has probably lost him support among the hardlining top echelons of the military, this same viewpoint may gain him support among the war-weary. His role of self-appointed opposition leader also adds to his appeal, and he is still remembered favorably as one of the primary movers in the overthrow of Ngo Dinh Diem. Our feeling at this preliminary stage is that if Don can attract some appealing people to his slate, he stands a good chance of winning in an honest election. However, in forming his People's Bloc, Don attracted members by promising them places on his slate. If this promise is kept, he will not have many places to offer to outsiders. (Don tells us he renounced his French citizenship in 1955 and thus would not be affected by a proposed feature of the Upper House election law which would disallow candidacies of dual citizens.)

b. Ton That Dinh (PB) - A likely candidate for a place on Don's slate. The two former generals have remained close associates in the Upper House.

c. Ksor Rot (PB) - Montagnard Rot has consistently been a member of Don's Upper House groupings. He probably expects a place on Don's slate, to which he could contribute his potential minority group appeal. (The ineffectual Rot probably has nowhere else to go.)

d. Le Van Thinh (PB) - This Hoa Hao Senator is a question-mark at present. He reportedly has had a falling-out with Don over People's Bloc finances, but is still officially a member of the bloc. If Thinh should leave the bloc, it will fall below the required 15-member minimum and dissolve, so Don has a vested interest in mending the breach. Thinh has been a singularly unimpressive, inactive Senator. If he does not get on Don's slate, his re-election is unlikely.

e. Pham Nam Truong (Social Democratic Bloc - SDB) - Senator Truong has allied himself in the Upper House with Senator Dang Van Sung on the pro-GVN side of the assembly hall, serving in effect as Sung's deputy in the

Social Democratic Bloc and in Sung's dealings with Tran Quoc Buu's new Farmer-Worker Party. He is a capable Senator who works quietly behind the scenes of the Upper House rather than on the floor. Truong's plans are uncertain. If he seeks re-election, he would like to run with Chairman Huyen. His close association with Sung also makes him a possible candidate for a slot on a Thieu-backed slate.

2. NGUYEN VAN HUYEN

Only three members of the "Public Good and Social Justice" slate, which forms the hard core of the Upper House Independent Group, drew three-year terms:

a. Nguyen Van Huyen - List leader and Upper House Chairman Huyen insists he has not yet made up his mind to run again. Poor health and lack of financial means are the reasons he cites for his indecision. (In 1967, he filed 24 hours before the candidacy deadline.) If he decides to run, and we think he will, he is a very likely winner. Over ten Senators (including list leaders Nguyen Gia Hien and Huynh Van Cao) have asked him for places on his slate, as have several Lower House deputies and other political figures. Huyen says he has not yet committed himself to anyone, although we suspect that he will give priority consideration to 1967 slate-mates Tran Huu Phuong and Lam Van Hiep. President Thieu has indicated to supporters that he would look kindly on a Huyen-led slate, so GVN backing, perhaps in return for inclusion of a couple of GVN candidates, is not to be ruled out for Huyen.

b. Tran Huu Phuong (Independent Group - IG) - An unspectacular but steady and conscientious Senator; he has asked for, and will probably get a place on Huyen's slate.

c. Lam Van Hiep (IG) - According to Huyen, Hiep is also conscientious and hardworking, but somewhat shy and quiet. He has also asked for, and will probably get, a place on Huyen's slate.

3. NGUYEN GIA HIEN

Seven out of the 10 "Greater Solidarity" List members drew three-year terms:

a. Nguyen Gia Hien (SDB) - Although Hien is expected to head his own list, the GSF leader has asked for a spot on Chairman Huyen's list. Huyen

DECLASSIFIED

has spoken favorably to us of Hien and although it is somewhat unlikely, it is not to be completely ruled out that Hien might run with the Chairman. It still seems more likely, however, that Hien will head, or at least be a GSF contribution to, a National Social Democratic Front slate, since he leads one of the five member parties of the NSDF, and is the most important Senatorial member of the pro-Thieu Front. However, Hien may elect to head a predominantly GSF list, if his party's list can also receive GVN backing.

b. Vu Ngoc Anh (SDB) - As Hien's nephew, Anh may be able to obtain a place on a Hien, or at least a GSF, list. However, some of Anh's colleagues, including fellow list member Tran Ngoc Nhuan, insist that he has an unsavory reputation and he may find it difficult even with his blood relationship to Hien to obtain a place on a list.

c. Tran Van Qua (SDB) - Southern GSFer Qua has asked to run with Chairman Huyen; we believe his chances for being accepted by the Chairman are minimal. He will probably end up on a GSF list.

d. Pham Van Trien (IG) - Election plans unknown.

e. Nguyen Huu Tien (SDB) -- Election plans unknown.

f. Bui Van Giai (SDB) - The earnest, dignified, conscientious Chairman of the Interior Committee makes an attractive Senator. He has asked to run with Chairman Huyen, who spoke very highly to us of Giai, who shares many of Huyen's own characteristics - modesty, dignity, forthrightness when convinced of his position, and religion (both are practicing Catholics). Of all of the Senators who would like to run with Huyen, GSFer Giai seems to be the type of candidate most likely to win the Chairman's approval.

g. Tran Ngoc Nhuan (SDB) - The hardworking, outspoken Chairman of the Interior Rules and Affairs Committee has not yet decided on what slate he will run. He has asked to run with Chairman Huyen, who has spoken highly of him and might decide that Nhuan deserves re-election as a reward for the very serious approach he has taken to his Upper House duties. Their styles are very different and a liaison between the two seems somewhat unlikely though not impossible. Nhuan says Tran Van Don has offered him a place on his list if Nhuan will join the People's Bloc, and he is tempted to accept. He does not expect GSF consideration this time because he believes he was only asked to join Hien's list in 1967 to add a military figure to the grouping. We think Nhuan would like to remain a Senator and if he is unable to run with Chairman Huyen, he would seem a logical candidate for a spot on a GVN-backed slate, perhaps one which includes fellow military man Huynh Van Cao.

4. HUYNH VAN CAO

The "Viet-Nam Sun" List was hit hard by the drawing, with 7 out of 10 members receiving 3-year terms:

a. Huynh Van Cao (SDB) - Former General Cao, 1967 list leader, would like to remain a Senator. He is one of the many Senators who has asked to run with Chairman Huyen. Although a Catholic, Cao's closeness to President Thieu might rule out favorable consideration by Huyen, who values his independent status. Failing this, Cao would like to head his slate and hopes to get Presidential assistance in this undertaking. He has been cooperating with the Nhan Xa lately and it is quite possible that he will eventually emerge heading, or at least as a member of, a heavily Catholic/Nhan Xa/Republican Masses ticket with several members selected by President Thieu.

b. Truong Tien Dat (SDB) - The intense, intelligent Culture and Education Committee Chairman has asked to run with Chairman Huyen, but he is probably too outspoken and emotional to win Huyen's acceptance even though he is Catholic. If Huyen refuses, Dat says he will run on Cao's slate. (Dat told us flatly that if Cao runs with Huyen, he will also run with Huyen.)

c. Pham Van Ba (SDB) - Ba has been a reasonably effective Senator, and Cao tells us he would not mind having him on his slate again. (Ba has not discussed his plans with us.)

d. Mrs. Nguyen Phuoc Dai (PB) - The First Vice Chairman of the Upper House has become a major anti-GVN critic in the last several months. She is now a Deputy Leader of the Don People's Bloc and our guess is that she will run with Don.

e. Nguyen Van Chuan (PB) - Another former general, Chuan reportedly joined Don's bloc at least in part because of the promise of a place on the Don slate.

f. Tran Canh (PB) - A nominal VNQDD, Canh is reportedly not associated with any particular faction of that divided party. An inactive Senator, he also was reportedly offered a slot on the Don list in return for People's Bloc membership.

g. Vong A Sang (PB) - A member of the Nung minority, Sang was also reportedly offered a slot on Don's slate if he joined the People's Bloc. (Like Ksor Rot, the ineffectual Sang probably has nowhere else to go.)

DECLASSIFIED

5. TRAN VAN LAM

Four of Foreign Minister Lam's colleagues on the "United for Progress" List drew three-year terms:

a. Tran Ngoc Oanh (SDB) - The capable former Minister of Public Works is one of the many Senators who have asked Chairman Huyen for a place on his list. A Southern Catholic, Oanh might possibly be acceptable to Huyen. Failing this, he is a logical candidate for a Nhan Xa, Republican Masses, or Thieu-backed list such as the list Huynh Van Cao may head.

b. Tran Chanh Thanh (IG) - The former Foreign Minister has not discussed his election plans with us. However, his young associate in the Republican Masses party Thanh is organizing, Nguyen Phuong Yem, tells us that this new party might join forces with the Nhan Xa in forming a slate. (The Nhan Xa at last reading, was not enthusiastic about such an alliance.)

c. Nguyen Phuong Yem (SDB) - The Upper House's youngest member has also asked to run with Chairman Huyen. Chances that he would be selected seem low, in which event he would probably run with a Nhan Xa-Republican Masses slate. Yem is quiet and somewhat frivolous and the Upper House could survive the loss of his membership, but he does attend the Upper House regularly and has drafted legislation (urban land reform), not yet acted upon by the Lower House, which is more than many of his colleagues can claim.

d. Dao Dang Vy (SDB) - Senator Vy's election plans are unknown to us.

6. NGUYEN NGOC KY

Only three members of the "Sheaf of Rice" List drew three-year terms:

a. Pham Nam Sach (PB) - Judiciary Committee Chairman Sach is currently a member of Tran Van Don's People's Bloc, but says he has not yet made up his mind about running with Don because (a) Sach is uncomfortable with Don's "third force" views and (b) he fears the GVN might prevent a Don ticket from winning. Sach has severed his connections with the Revolutionary Dai Viets, and is somewhat rootless at present except for his somewhat tentative tie to Don. Surprisingly, the outspoken oppositionist tells us he would like to run with Upper House Chairman Huyen, but Sach's style is so unlike Huyen's it is doubtful that he would be accepted by that quiet independent.

DECLASSIFIED

Sach would bring his reputation as an intelligent, conscientious, hardworking but controversial and sometimes extreme Senator to a slate, and could lend a Buddhist cast to a slate should that be required, for example, by any Catholic grouping.

b. Ton That Uan (IG) - This polished, capable Revolutionary Dai Viet Senator wants to remain in the Upper House. He says he has not yet decided on which slate to run, but he would be a logical and worthy RDV contribution to a National Social Democratic Front slate.

c. Nguyen Van Man (IG) - Another RDV, but one who does not seem to participate much in Upper House activities. His election plans are unknown to us.

SAIGON 1058